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Collier-Howard House

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In searching out their roots, descendants of Vines Collier often make a pilgrimage to Oglethorpe County, Georgia, and the Collier-Howard House, the home and burial site of the Collier patriarch. The original portion of the Collier-Howard House was constructed by Vines Collier about 1790. In 2010, the Colonial Dames honored the structure with an official marking ceremony. The following text, by Elaine Collier Neal, was delivered as part of that ceremony. It is posted here with Elaine's permission.

The Historic Collier-Howard House

We are here to mark the historic Collier-Howard House which is nearly 225 years old. The house is named Collier because Vines Collier was the original owner and it is named Howard because generations of the Howard family have lived in it for 175 years. Information on the house is found in the Historic Surveys of Oglethorpe county, court house records, and in the History of Salem Baptist Church 1789-1989 by Carolyn Faz. I will present a few interesting facts about the house and at lunch we can talk more about the house's architectural details and reminisce about the Collier and Howard families.

Vines Collier is an interesting person in Oglethorpe County history. He was a Virginian who fought in the French and Indian war; however, by the time of the American Revolution, Vines was too old to fight so he provided supplies to the American side. After the Revolutionary War, Vines and his growing family moved to Wilkes County, Georgia where he purchased 400 acres of land from George Lumpkin in 1786 to build his home. This area which became Oglethorpe County in December 1793 formed the frontier between the settled farmers to the east and the Cherokee and Creek Indians to the north and west.

We assume that Vines and his grown sons built the plantation plain house with its four rooms on the first floor and two upper rooms connected by an enclosed stairway. The kitchen and other dependencies were nearby. These original rooms still exist today, with their original doors, wainscoting, and "Williamsburg-style" mantles. Underneath the house, three unique wooden grills were placed in the brick underpinning to ventilate the dry cellar. An enclosed, hidden stairway to the second floor assisted anyone escaping Indian raids.

Vines Collier and his wife Sarah Elizabeth Williamson had thirteen children: Elizabeth, Thomas, John, Isaac, Ann, called Nancy, Cuthbert, William, Vines, Benjamin, Williamson, Robert, Mary called Polly, and Sarah, called Sally. Two of these sons, John and Isaac served on the first Grand Jury in Oglethorpe County.

Vines Collier died in 1795 and was buried near his home. He left his wife Sarah with minor children to raise. Isaac and his family lived adjacent to his mother Sarah and the youngest children. The Colliers' oldest child Elizabeth had married Rev. John Dunn in Virginia and the Dunns also lived nearby. At that time, tobacco was the main cash crop of the Bowling Green area. Sarah Collier died about 1812 and was buried in the family cemetery. Most of the children married in Oglethorpe county and some began to move away.

Cuthbert Collier sold the plantation in 1824 to Peachy R Gilmer, the brother of Governor George Gilmer. Peachy had the property about ten years before he sold it to William T. Howard in 1836 for \$600. In that deed the property was described as having 370 acres because earlier Vines Collier had sold a small tract of land to the Salem Baptist Church. We do not know if Peachy ever lived in the Collier-Howard house. He owned a lot of land in the district and already had a house.

The next 175 years of house history belongs to the Howard family and their successive six generations. William T. Howard married Rebecca Milner in 1833. We suspect but can not prove that William purchased the plantation so Rebecca could be near her family. William and Rebecca Howard had six children, most of whom were born in the historic house. Rebecca died in 1842 and was buried in the nearby Milner family cemetery. In 1853 William T. Howard married Mary Favor Arnold and they

were the parents of seven children. William T. Howard and his family belonged to Salem Baptist Church, relocated further up the road, and in time, many were buried in the church cemetery.

With such a growing family, it is not surprising that William T. Howard decided to enlarge his house. According to family tradition, James Norton was the builder. He is the most likely one because Norton lived in the Maxeys area, is listed in the census as a house carpenter, and is associated with several of the similar, square columned-homes in the Philomath Historic District of Oglethorpe.

According to E. Walker Howard, the house was remodeled before 1850. The builder doubled the size of the house--established a central hall, added four rooms, erected a two story, square-columned portico--and created a beautiful Greek Revival plantation house. This is the house people see today. In renovating the house, Norton was careful to blend the new and old parts.

The heyday of the Howard plantation is probably the 1860s. At that time, according to the US agricultural census, William T. Howard had approximately 2,000 acres of land, 44 slaves, and grew and ginned 70 bales of cotton, each weighing 400 lbs. There is a program to honor centennial farms but I don't know that there is one to honor bicentennial ones. This farm is approaching that distinction.

As you would expect, over the decades, the house has been updated by incorporating a kitchen, two bathrooms, and utilities. The old kitchen, which was linked to the house by a log walkway, and other wooden structures have been removed to reduce the fire hazard.

This lovely home stands as a physical reminder of our cultural heritage covering 225 years. It represents the architecture of the period, the Collier and the Howard families, Salem Baptist Church, and the Bowling Green farming area of Oglethorpe County, Georgia. It deserves our admiration and preservation. We are honored to mark it today.

In 1929, Jena C. Collier took the following photographs of the house.



This view shows the majestic setting atop a hill surrounded by cultivated fields.





Studies underway today may eventually lead to the Collier-Howard House being included in the National Registry of Historic Places.

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